

Inu regrets Mohsin's comments on journos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Hasanul Haque Inu yesterday offered apology and regretted the derogatory remarks of Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali about journalists.

In future, cabinet members as well as common people will have to remain careful about making “provocative” statements keeping in mind the provisions of the national broadcasting policy, he told a press conference at the Press Information Department.

The press meet was organised to clarify the government's stance on the broadcasting policy.

Speaking at a discussion in Sylhet on Saturday, Mohsin Ali said journalists are “dirty chaps and of bad character”.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in an informal discussion at the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday told Mohsin Ali, “You've become a minister and now you can't say whatever you wish to say. You'll have to

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Chronic sleep

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deprivation according to the 10-year study published in The Lancet, with crew members aboard the now-retired space shuttle sleeping for less than six hours a night on average while those crewing the International Space Station (ISS) managed just over six hours of kip.

This is far less than 8.5 hours of sleep that Nasa orders astronauts to get every night and less than the average of six and a half hours achieved by UK and US sleepers.

The study, which used a special wrist watch to study the sleeping habits of 85 different crew members between 2001 and 2011, also highlighted a worrying dependence on sleeping pills, with more than the three-quarters of astronauts using sedatives such as Ambien on more than half their nights in space.

“The ability for a crew member to optimally perform if awakened from sleep by an emergency alarm may be jeopardised by the use of sleep-promoting pharmaceuticals,” wrote lead author Laura Barger of Brigham and Women's Hospital at the Harvard Medical School.

The sleeping troubles didn't just happen in space either. As well as studying 4,200 nights of sleep off-Earth, the study looked at 4,000 nights of sleep at home, finding that even during the astronaut's three month pre-flight training period they averaged only 6.5 hours of sleep.

“Because chronic sleep loss leads to performance decrements, our findings emphasise the need for development of effective countermeasures to promote sleep,” wrote the authors in the paper's abstract.

For astronauts on board the ISS there's no such thing as a 'natural' sleeping pattern, with the station running on Coordinate Universal Time (the same as GMT) but with the sun rising and setting every 90 minutes.

Crew members bunk down in dedicated 'sleep stations' where they climb into sleeping bags tied to a wall. The lack of gravity means they don't have to worry about a pillow to support their neck but the study suggested that extra measures (such as the exposure to specific wavelengths of light) might be necessary to ensure astronauts can say 'Good-night Earth' and mean it.



Structures being built beside the Dhaka-Tangail highway for claiming damages before the work on highway expansion starts. The photo was taken at Pakula in Mirzapur.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Shady houses along highway

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Jabed Ali, a landowner of Shreefoltoly village under Kaliakair upazila, has erected many tin-shed rooms on his land.

“Everyone has built rooms on their lands to get more money as compensation. I have just followed suit,” he said.

Mahbub Hossain, deputy commissioner in Tangail and president of the district land acquisition committee (Bhumi Hukum Dokhol Committee), told The Daily Star that compensation package would be offered for acquired lands as per local rate.

“No compensation, however, will be offered for these unnecessarily built structures as we had collected video footage of the area and its side areas before we started the land acquisition process,” he added.

An official at the local land office told this correspondent a section of unscrupulous officials and employees involved with land survey and the process of acquisition always inform

brokers in advance of the selected swathes of land to be acquired.

“Brokers then take these lands on lease and build as many structures as possible to make some extra money,” he added wishing anonymity.

Mozibor Rahman, another farmer from Kodalia village under Mirzapur upazila, had leased 10 decimals of his land to one Ashraf Shikder of Sohagpara village for one year at Tk 15,000.

“I later knew Ashraf has leased it again to another person and later one contractor named Russel Miah built at least 50 rooms on my land with low quality corrugated iron sheets and bricks,” he added.

Officials of the land acquisition (LA) section under the deputy commissioner's office had done the survey to earmark the pieces of land for acquisition.

Nasrin Sultana, assistant commissioner (land) in Mirzapur, however, denied the allegation of any collusion

between land officials and brokers.

“We are aware of these structures but we have no information about any collusion between land officials and brokers,” she said.

Areas where such structures have been built include Cadet College, Hatubhanga, Kodalia, Gorai, Nazirpara, Sohagpara, Dherua, Bawar Kumarjani, Mirzapur Bypass, Postkamuri, Noyapara, Ichail, Kurni, Dhalla, Pakulla, Jamurki and Mohera under Mirzapur upazila in Tangail, and Kaliakair Bypass, Sahebbazar, Bordghar, Sutrapur, Shafipur, Chandara, Kouchakuri, Kalampur, Hortokitala, Uttor Boktarpur, Daikini, Kharajora, Goalbathan and Shreefoltoly under Kaliakair upazila in Gazipur.

The highway will also be part of SAARC Highway Corridor-4, Asian Highway-2 and Asian Highway-41. The foreign-aided project is expected to end by March 2018.

Ctg Jamaat

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Satkania Police Station, said acting on a tip-off, police conducted a drive in Babunagar Asrayan Prakalpa area to nab Shahidul while he along with a group of around 15 Jamaat-Shibir cadres was preparing to commit a robbery around 11:40pm.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, the Jamaat-Shibir men opened fire and police also returned fire, triggering a “gunfight”.

Shahidul was hit by bullets in his right leg and was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. Police caught the three while the others managed to flee the scene, Hai said.

Two cases have been filed with Satkania Police Station in this connection.

Shahidul was involved in vandalism and arson attacks during the Jamaat-imposed hartals in Satkania in January this year. He stands accused in 11 criminal cases filed with Satkania Police Station over robbery, vandalism and arson attacks, the police official added.

However, Shahidul's family alleged that police picked him up from the upazila's Rampur area in the evening and shot him.

Didarul Alam, brother of Shahidul, said Shahidul is a Jamaat supporter. Police picked up Shahidul when he was on the way home.

US 'sending arms directly' to Kurds

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current self defense activities,” Lieutenant General William Mayville told reporters at the Pentagon yesterday.

Last week, US warplanes launched strikes to beat back extremist fighters from the so-called Islamic State who had threatened to massacre the Yazidi religious minority and attack Arbil.

Arbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, hosts a US consulate and other facilities, and President Barack Obama said he had ordered air strikes to protect American lives.

US planes joined Iraqi forces in attempting to bring aid to thousands of Yazidis trapped on an exposed mountain and under attack by the IS militants who had driven them from their homes.

The sight of US jets and drones in action over Iraq again, less than three years after American forces withdrew

from the country, has raised fears that Washington is once again being dragged into war.

But Mayville insisted that there had been no mission creep.

The US officials said weapons have also been shipped in three deliveries from the Iraqi government in Baghdad to Arbil, consisting mostly of AK-47 assault rifles and ammunition. Reuters was first to report on Friday that the Iraqi government had sent a first, unprecedented shipment of ammunition to Arbil.

The United States has long insisted that all sales of US weapons must go through Iraq's central government, despite Kurdish complaints that Baghdad had deprived them of promised military equipment and financial support.

Critics accuse US President Barack Obama of being reluctant or too slow

to intervene in thorny foreign policy issues which have piled up under his watch, including the dramatic rise of the Islamic State, which has seized control of large swathes of land in the north and west of OPEC member Iraq.

A senior US defence official acknowledged that the US was providing arms and ammunition needed by the Kurds but said it was not coming from the Department of Defence. Officials said the Pentagon was having discussions about how to increase its military support to the Kurds and could soon approve a decision to directly supply weaponry.

FIRST SINCE 2011

Just last week Washington launched its first military action in Iraq since pulling its troops out in 2011. US warplanes bombed Sunni insurgents from the Islamic State, who have marched through northern and western Iraq

since June.

Washington says it is taking limited action to protect the Kurdish autonomous region and prevent what Obama called a potential “genocide” of religious minorities targeted by the militants.

The militants made new gains against Kurdish forces despite three days of US airstrikes, while Baghdad, long braced for the Sunni fighters to attack, was now tensing for possible clashes between forces loyal to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and those of his rivals after Iraq's president named a new prime minister on Monday.

Obama says a more inclusive government in Baghdad is a precondition for more aggressive US military support against the Islamic State. He has rejected calls in some quarters for a return of US ground troops, apart from several hundred military advisers sent in June.

[Reports by Reuters and AFP]

Bangladeshi abducted, killed in Malaysia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Failing to get ransom, a group of Myanmar human traffickers killed a Bangladeshi worker after abducting him in George Town of Malaysia on Saturday, reports local newspaper The Star.

The dead is Hussain Mohammad Alahi, 39, a resident of Daudkandi upazila in Comilla, Mantu Kuma Biswas, counsellor (labour) at a Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

Alahi's body was found in a jungle at Bukit Relau in Jalan Bukit Gambier of George Town on Sunday, he said, adding that the body was later sent to Penang Hospital for autopsy.

The Malaysian police are yet to arrest any of the suspected murderers but detained four other Bangladeshis for quizzing, Mantu added.

He, however, couldn't give the details of the detained Bangladeshis.

The autopsy report showed the deceased had been strangled, said

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Canada calls for dialogue

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meet the press programme organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (DCAB) at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Regarding the upcoming movement by the BNP, she said, “We want to see shift in political culture ... in democracy there must be scope for dissents, but that must be peaceful, not violent.”

Terming the violence ahead of the elections last year as “distressingly regular part of life”, she said the minorities, in particular the Hindus, bore the brunt of many of these attacks.

“The measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable,” Cruden said, adding that many individuals from religious minorities sadly remain unprotected and continue to fear for their lives.

She said the January 5 election was constitutional, but Canada was disappointed that more than half of the parliamentary seats were not contested freely.

However, she said, the elections had brought relief by putting an end to the violence.

“We all hope the violence will not be starting again,” she said, adding that the five-year cycle of electoral violence and instability should be broken.

The diplomat mentioned that democracy requires strong independent institutions, space for media and civil society to be able to constructively criticise the government and hold it to

account.

Asked on the government's new broadcast policy and some politicians' objectionable remarks in recent days, Cruden said, “We will continue to closely monitor it.”

On trade issues, she said Canada wants to help Bangladesh prosper, especially through training human resources and developing the readymade garment (RMG) sector and that the Canadian companies are now trying to help ensure safety at garment factories in the country.

“Let me be clear: there is no alternative. After Rana Plaza, Canadian consumers will not tolerate clothes made under dangerous conditions,” Cruden said.

If Bangladesh's garment sector continues to improve working and safety conditions, it could thrive, otherwise it would wither, she told journalists adding that Canada does not want to see the RMG sector in Bangladesh flourishing “at the expense of workers' lives”.

The annual trade between the two countries stands at \$ 1.8 billion, said the diplomat.

Regarding Canada's stance on Israeli attacks on Palestine, she said Israel has the right to self-defence and that Hamas is a terrorist organisation. She, however, did not elaborate on the issue.

DCAB president Mainul Alam and general secretary Angur Nahar Monty also spoke at the programme.

War role ignored

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The Awami League-led government restored the original provision on nationalism in the constitution through the 15th amendment to the constitution in 2011. This time round, matters have worsened further for Bangladesh's indigenous communities.

In the process of bringing about massive changes in the country's supreme charter, indigenous people's leaders were invited by the parliamentary body for constitutional amendments. At the meeting, they had demanded constitutional recognition as indigenous people and protection from long persecution.

The parliamentary body, however, did not pay heed to their demands and recommended describing them as “tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities”. And thus a new provision was introduced in the constitution accordingly.

Under the heading, “The culture of tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities”, the newly introduced Article 23A of the constitution now only says, “The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities.”

Interestingly, none of the five AL MPs belonging to indigenous communities who were in the last parliament raised any objection to the passage of the constitutional amendment bill. They accepted the ruling AL's decision and voted for the amendments in line with Article 70 of the constitution.

More surprise was waiting for indigenous people on the eve of International Indigenous People's Day. While the world prepared to observe the day to promote and protect their rights, the government on Thursday came up with a handout advising all to dispense with the word “Adivasi” (in English the word ‘Adivasi’ is often referred as ‘indigenous’).

In its defence, the government cited the 15th amendment to the constitution and curiously claimed that according to the constitution, indigenous (Adivasi) people “do not exist” in this country.

The government's claim suffers from contradiction. The constitutional

provision does in no way impose any restriction on the use of the word “Adivasi”. Rather, many government laws and documents still exist where the word “Adivasi” is used.

Take some examples.

The Ethnic Communities Cultural Institution Act of 2010, enacted by the previous AL-led government, also uses the word “Adivasi” to describe people belonging to different ethnic sects and communities.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-II) for FY 2009-11 approved by parliament during the past AL-led government in 2009 contained a special provision on indigenous communities. The PRSP noted, “Bangladesh has around forty-five different small ethnic communities i.e. indigenous communities-- and two million indigenous people. Some of the ‘hardcore poor’ in Bangladesh are found among the indigenous communities.”

“For the indigenous people, the vision is to ensure their social, political and economic rights; ensure security and fundamental human rights; and preserve their social and cultural identity,” announced the PRSP.

The second PRSP was prepared in light of the AL's manifesto for the 2008 parliamentary election.

In the electoral pledges, the AL used the phrase “indigenous people” and promised that terrorism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people must come to an end permanently.

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 uses the phrase “aboriginal castes or tribes” to refer to several groups which identify themselves as indigenous or Adivasi. This law has separate provisions to protect the rights of Adivasis to land.

The AL-led government suddenly backtracked from its original stance in the process of passage of the 15th amendment to the constitution. Now it denies the existence of Adivasi people in the country through issuing the ridiculous handout. By issuing the last moment handout the government has only worsened the plight of Bangladesh's indigenous people.